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10 June 2005

RUS100121.E

Russia: The Baltic Republican Party in Kaliningrad; mandate, structure, membership and treatment of its members by the authorities; whether the party has ceased its operations and been renamed the Kaliningrad Public Movement-Respublika (2001-May 2005)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Baltic Republican Party in Kaliningrad

The Baltic Republican Party (BRP) was founded in 1992 and as recently as February 2005 its leader was Sergei Pasko (Ren TV 2 May 2003; BNS News Agency 30 Oct. 2002; Gazeta.ru 22 Feb. 2005).

The BNS News Agency described the BRP as "a minor party representing mainly small and medium business" (8 Nov. 2001).

A number of media reports stated that the authorities shut down the BRP, although they differed in the date of the closure, variously reporting it as 27 October 2002 (BNS News Agency 30 Oct. 2002), February 2004 (ITAR-TASS 1 Feb. 2005) or February 2005 (*Miami Herald* 3 Apr. 2005; *Kommersant* 22 Feb. 2005). The BRP reportedly had between 500 and 600 members at the time it ceased operations (ibid.; BNS News Agency 30 Oct. 2002; ITAR-TASS 1 Feb. 2005).

The BRP contested court decisions based on the Russian law on political parties, which requires parties to have a minimum of 10,000 members and active branches in half of Russia's regions in order to be registered (ibid.). In February 2005, ruling on the complaint brought forward by the BRP, the Russian Constitutional Court confirmed the validity of the law on political parties (ibid.). According to the ruling, all parties that did not meet the minimum requirements would have to "self-dissolve by January 1, 2006, or transform into public associations" (ibid.).

According to the *Miami Herald*, the BRP's main goal was to make Kaliningrad "a fully independent state" (3 Apr. 2005). BRP leader Sergei Pasko maintained that 100,000 people from Kaliningrad supported this idea (Ren TV 2 May 2003).

Other sources stated that the BRP's plans for Kaliningrad were more about "the acquisition of a special international legal status" (BNS News Agency 30 Oct. 2002), including the ability to negotiate its trade deals with the EU and to regulate its own commercial affairs (*Wall Street Journal* 27 Feb. 2003). The BRP also called for greater economic deregulation (ibid.). Sources added that the BRP leader suggested that immigration should be controlled by local authorities in Kaliningrad (*South China Morning Post* 4 Aug. 2002) and that dual citizenship (Russian and EU) should be granted to the inhabitants of Kaliningrad (*Expert* 17 June 2002).

The leader of the BRP told the *Wall Street Journal* in February 2003 that: "[Kaliningrad will] be a partly independent state in connection with the Russian Federation [...] But we hope to be a subject of the EU as well" (27 Feb. 2003). He had declared to the *Boston Globe* in October 2002 that "Kaliningrad should become an autonomous region within Russia, but which would bring its laws in line with EU standards" (6 Oct. 2002).

According to the BNS News Agency, the 6 November 2001 congress of the party did not support Sergei Pasko's idea of "a referendum on increasing the federal status of Kaliningrad Region" (8 Nov. 2001).

The Ekho Moskvy News Agency reported that the BRP had collected signatures from residents in favour of the city of Kaliningrad going back to its previous name of Koenigsberg (24 July 2002).

A 9 August 2001 article from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty indicated that some polls showed that support for the BRP was around 5 per cent, while the party leader "[said] the actual figure [was] closer to 50

per cent."

No information on the BRP membership cards or the treatment of its members by the authorities was found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The Kaliningrad Public Movement-Respublika

Gazeta.ru reported that a "Respublika Kaliningrad Public Movement" was created in February 2005 by Sergei Pasko, chairman of the banned Baltic Republican Party and president of the Kaliningrad Entrepreneurs Union (22 Feb. 2005). The main goal of the movement is to obtain international status permitting "independent relations with the European Union, while retaining associate membership of the Russian Federation" (Gazeta.ru 22 Feb. 2005; see also RFE/RL 23 Feb. 2005 and *Miami Herald* 3 Apr. 2005). A deputy from the Oblast Duma, Vitautas Lopata, is described as a sponsor of the movement (ibid.) or co-chairman, according to the *Kommersant* (22 Feb. 2005). On 23 February 2005, RFE/RL stated that about 300 people took part in the movement's founding congress.

Sergei Pasko had declared to the *Kommersant*: "Respublika is not the BRP. There is interaction, but not more. We have shifted to the higher level - we are preparing a legal basis" (*Kommersant* 22 Feb. 2005).

According to the *Kommersant*, the new movement's flag is orange and contains the words "KOD Respublika" (Kaliningrad Public Movement Republic, in Russian) (22 Feb. 2005). The funding for this movement is said to come from "members of the regional Union of Entrepreneurs" (ibid.).

No other information on the Kaliningrad Public Movement-Respublika was found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: Human Rights Watch, The Kaliningrad Oblast Administration, *Pravda.ru*, World News Connection.

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